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Puerto Rican youth lag behind white and Negro students in mathematical and verbal ability and reading comprehension and, although data seem incomplete, many of them seem to drop out of school because they feel alienated in the English-speaking school and because they feel a debilitating sense of a lack of control over what happens to them. Efforts have been made to change the attitudes of teachers toward their Puerto Rican pupils (eg. trips to Puerto Rico and seminars to discuss mutual problems), but they have been ineffective; it may be more important to staff schools with Puerto Ricans and to introduce Puerto Rican culture into curriculum and textbooks than to try to change attitudes. It has been shown that Puerto Rican youth receiving bilingual instruction can simultaneously learn the subject matter in Spanish and acquire skills in the use of English. Also, for parents to help their children, they must be involved in the schools, and liaison, possibly through bilingual mediators, must be established to permit them to express their grievances and problems. (EF)

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THE LOSERS

A Report on

PUERTO RICANS AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

Richard J. Margolis

Commissioned

by

Aspira, Inc.

May, 1968

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PREFACE

Three months ago Aspira asked Richard J. Margolis, an experienced writer on educational problems, to visit a number of cities and report on the educational conditions faced by Puerto Ricans on the mainland. We wanted to know whether the situation in New York City which Aspira had been confronting was the same elsewhere in the nation.

This report has been prepared to serve as a common starting place for those attending the national conference on "Meeting the Special Educational Needs of Urban Puerto Rican Youth" (May 14 and 15, 1968). It has been designed to raise questions, not to answer them, and to provoke discussion between Puerto Rican community leaders and those responsible for educational policy making.

It is clear that the Puerto Rican community must have the opportunity to share in deciding which approaches are most effective in dealing with their own children. This presupposes effective organizations which authentically represent Puerto Ricans and are capable of influencing the established educational systems.

The report points out that Negro and Puerto Rican schoolchildren endure many of the same inequities. The literature on minority problems seems to assume that solving the problems of the Negro child will at the same time solve those of the Puerto Rican child. In many areas of education this is true, but it is also true that Puerto Rican children face unique educational problems which demand unique solutions. The report identifies many of these problems ranging from language deficiencies and cultural differences to the virtual absence of Puerto Rican professionals within the school system.

Complicated by rapid population growth and shifting locales, and partly obscured by the lack of hard data, the picture which emerges is a grim one. However, one hopeful sign is in the developing role of parents and private agencies. Another is the very awareness of the problem as represented by the support of those who have made this report and conference possible.

But for the 400,000 Puerto Rican children in public schools today, public awareness of their predicament is not enough. What is needed is action. Independent agencies such as Aspira can and do offer essential services right now. But clearly the magnitude of the challenge is such that widespread change in public agencies will be required. They, in turn, will have to be backed by a major moral commitment on the part of all Americans to

provide *every* child, regardless of race or origins, with the opportunity to fulfill his potential.

America has not yet made this commitment and all of us have been "the losers." With pride in our Puerto Rican heritage and with faith in the American dream we now have an opportunity to make our children the winners.

Louis Nuñez
Executive Director
Aspira, Inc.
New York, New York 10001
May 14, 1968

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FOREWORD

This report examines the predicament of Puerto Rican children in our public schools: what they are learning and what they are not learning, what the schools are doing and what the schools are not doing. The report lists no specific conclusions – although several implied ones are there for the taking – and makes no explicit recommendations. Its purpose is to put the problem in sharper focus and on wider display, not to promote any single set of solutions.

Our public schools of late have provided such a large and comfortable target for the slings and arrows of reformers that one hesitates to pierce them with yet another. I have tried to be more thought-provoking than people-provoking, and if my judgments at times strike some as unduly harsh it is because the lives of so many schoolchildren strike me as unduly sad.

The title of this report – "The Losers" – refers to us all. The children are losing all hopes of learning or succeeding; the schools are losing all hopes of teaching; and the nation is losing another opportunity, perhaps its last, to put flesh on the American dream.

Much has already been written on this subject. In his preliminary bibliography Prof. Frank M. Cordasco lists some 450 articles and studies devoted to "Puerto Rican Children in American Schools." More recently the *IRCD Bulletin* has published a helpful "Selected Bibliography" on the same subject.* Many of the studies are worth reading, but none surveys the current scene, particularly the scene beyond New York City. My assignment from Aspira was to fill the gap.

The result is by no means definitive, but it does offer at least an outline of the major challenges today confronting the public schools and the Puerto Rican community. In gathering material I visited sixteen schools in seven cities: Bridgeport, Conn., Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, Hoboken, Paterson and New York. Wherever I went and whomever I talked to – teachers, administrators, children and parents – I was warmly received and meticulously enlightened. One hopes the report, the conference and the long-range results will justify the trouble they went to.

Richard J. Margolis
Georgetown, Conn.
April 22, 1968

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I. THE CHILDREN

"Our children are not being taught
to read or do their arithmetic."

– a Puerto Rican parent in Chicago

No one can say precisely how many Puerto Rican children are enrolled in public schools in the United States, but anyone who has examined their predicament knows they tend to learn less, lose heart more and drop out sooner than their classmates. It is true that their classmates, mostly poor and often black, fare none too well either. The Puerto Rican child and the Negro child share many humiliations, not the least of which is a system of even-handed injustice dispensed by big-city school administrations throughout the North. But the Puerto Rican child carries additional burdens all his own, his status as a stranger in our midst being perhaps the heaviest, and these have been sufficient to keep him at the very bottom of the educational pyramid.

The observer can but dimly discern the everyday frustrations which many Puerto Rican schoolchildren have come to take for granted: their imperfect grasp of English, which often seals both their lips and their minds; their confusion about who they are (what race? what culture?), a confusion compounded by the common ravages of white prejudice;[1] their sense of being lost, of traveling through a foregin country with a heedless guide and an undecipherable map. The list of frustrations is long. They may not reveal the whole truth, but they do illuminate many of the consequences.

They Learn Less

The many Puerto Rican parents who complain that their children "are not being taught to read or do their arithmetic" are usually right. No new study is required to confirm their anxieties; findings in the Coleman Report on *Equality of Educational Opportunity*[2] are sufficiently eloquent. They indicate that Puerto Rican children in the

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[1]An exchange, during a routine shakedown on the streets of Philadelphia, between a white policeman and a Puerto Rican teenager may shed light on this subject. "Are you a spic or a nigger?" the policeman asked.

"I'm a Puerto Rican, cop."

The policeman hit him. "Don't you know you're not supposed to call me a cop?"

"Excuse me, officer, don't you know you're not supposed to call me a spic?"

The teenager told this story, on tape, to a white interviewer. It may or may not be accurate in every detail, but the message is clear.

[2]by James S. Coleman & Associates, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402, Catalogue #FS 5.238:38001, 1966. $4.25. For a pertinent summary, see Robert A. Dentler's "Equality of Educational Opportunity" in *Urban Review*, December 1966. All subsequent references to the Coleman Report will be based on Dentler's summary unless otherwise noted.

United States lag behind both urban whites[3] and urban Negroes in verbal ability, reading comprehension and mathematics.

Test scores of sixth grade students, for example, place the average Puerto Rican child about three years behind the average white child in all three categories of achievement, and about one year behind the average Negro child. In the later grades, the gap between Negroes and Puerto Ricans narrows, but the gap between whites and the two minority groups becomes wider. Relatively speaking, the longer a Puerto Rican child attends public school, the less he learns.[4]

They Lose Heart

The less he learns, the more he despairs. One of Coleman's tests, designed to assess the student's sense of control over his life, contained this statement: "Every time I try to get ahead, something stops me." Almost a third of the Puerto Rican children agreed with the statement, compared to about a fifth of the Negroes and only one-eighth of the whites.

Answers to another test statement – "Good luck is more important than hard work for success" – were just as revealing. Nineteen per cent of the Puerto Rican children agreed; nine per cent of the Negroes; four per cent of the whites.

"Shallow men believe in luck," wrote Emerson. So do deeply hurt children. If many Puerto Rican children feel they lack control over their environment – and therefore over their own destinies – the reasons are not hard to find. Here are some very routine examples of helplessness, chosen from many I came across while visiting schools and families:

• A six-year-old was roundly scolded by his teacher for wetting his pants. All morning he had been trying to tell her – in Spanish! – that he had to go to the bathroom.

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[3]It requires no uncommon eyesight to see that some Puerto Ricans are dark, many are white and others are in-between. But the tortured nomenclature of ethnic studies has decreed that "Puerto Rican" be neither "white" nor "Negro" – in effect, that it be its own color. The ambiguous terms do nothing to clarify matters, but since I am making use of some of the studies, I have sorrowfully adopted some of their categories. (The U.S. Census Bureau defines a Puerto Rican as anyone who was born on the island or who has at least one parent who was born on the island.)

[4]Dentler summarizes the overall results of the three tests as follows:

Test	Group	6th grade	9th grade	12th grade
Verbal Ability	White	6	9	12
	Puerto Rican	3.3	6.1	8.4
	Negro	4.4	6.6	8.7
Reading Comprehension	White	6	9	12
	Puerto Rican	2.9	5.7	8.3
	Negro	4.2	6.4	9.1
Mathematics	White	6	9	12
	Puerto Rican	3.2	5.6	7.2
	Negro	4	6.2	6.8

• Jose Gonzales, a kindergartener, has given up trying to tell his teacher his name is not Joe. It makes her angry.

• An honor student asked her counsellor for a chance to look at college catalogues. "Is that Italian or Spanish?" asked the counsellor, looking at the name on the girl's card. "Spanish? Now this is just my opinion, but I think you'd be happier as a secretary."[5]

• A vocational student hoping to become an electrician did the same wiring job for four consecutive years, over and over and over again.

• A "phys ed" instructor noticed that one of the girls was wearing a new gym suit. "Oh," he said loudly, "did the welfare check come?"

• A junior high school student was accused by his teacher of lying because he averted his eyes when speaking to her, a sign of respect on the island.

• A little girl couldn't wait to get her first report card. But when she got it there was nothing written on it except two big letters: "LD". Language Difficulty.

• A teenager told his principal he would have to drop out if he wasn't given protection from assulting gangs whose turf lay between home and school. The principal referred him to a psychiatrist.[6]

But I am running ahead of my story.

They Drop Out

Things being what they are, it is not surprising to hear from some teachers and administrators that Puerto Rican schoolchildren have nowhere to go but up. Yet there is little support even for that faintly comforting notion. It would be more accurate to say that Puerto Rican children have nowhere to go but *out* – out of the schools and into a world for which they are unprepared. This they are doing in large numbers. The public schools are like a giant sieve, sifting out all but the strongest, the smartest or the luckiest.

Many school administrators insist they have no serious dropout problem among Puerto Rican students. Some attribute the low high school enrollment totals to the newness of the Puerto Rican community. "Their kids haven't reached high school age yet." High school principals also like to say that Puerto Rican students who leave school are not really dropouts – they are simply "transfers" to another school. "We have a mobility problem, not a dropout problem."[7]

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[5]In yet another of Coleman's tests, high school seniors were asked: "Have you ever read a college catalog?" A "Yes" response was given by 45 per cent of the Puerto Ricans, 59 per cent of the Negroes and 73 per cent of the whites.

[6]After enduring more beatings, he did drop out – a healthy response to a most unhealthy situation.

[7]"How blind must he be that he can't see through a sieve?" – *Cervantes*

There is probably something to be said for both these explanations, but not much. Experience in cities where the Puerto Rican community has had time to produce its share of teenagers makes it clear that the dropout syndrome cannot be explained away. For example, in 1966 in New York City public schools, Puerto Ricans comprised more than one-fifth of the total enrollment but less than one-eighth of the academic high school enrollment. On the other hand, non-Puerto Rican whites accounted for about half the total enrollment and about two-thirds of the academic high school enrollment.[8]

Plainly, a lot of Puerto Rican elementary students are disappearing before they reach high school. The picture is similar in Newark, where there are more than five-thousand Puerto Ricans in public schools. They account for eight per cent of all elementary students but only four per cent of all high school students. The comparable figures for non-Puerto Rican whites is 18 per cent for elementary school and 36 per cent for high school.

As for the claim that dropouts are really transfers to other schools, one must ask: What schools? Surely none of those I visited. Somewhere in America there may be a Shangrila high school into which Puerto Rican teenagers drop. If so, it is overcrowded.

The widespread policy of putting back teenage Puerto Ricans to lower grades (because of their language difficulties) is one reason they drop out. The teenager is likely to feel both foolish and bored among children three and fours years his junior. Rather than be left back he may prefer to be left out altogether.

We get an inkling of these difficulties by looking at Hoboken's dropout figures for 1967. Of the 149 students who dropped out, 131 "left to seek employment." *Almost half the dropouts left before the tenth grade.* We have no way of knowing how many of these were Puerto Rican – they comprise more than a third of the overall school population – but it seems likely that only a Puerto Rican would be old enough to drop out of the eighth grade in order to look for a job.[9]

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[8]The figures suggest an accumulated total of more than 20,000 Puerto Rican dropouts who would otherwise have been attending academic high schools in 1966. Nevertheless, the figures show a slight improvement:

	% Puerto Ricans in New York City's Academic High Schools and in All Schools	
	All Schools	Academic High School
1957	14%	5%
1966	21%	12%

(All enrollment figures in this report have been supplied by the local school administrations.)

[9]The 1967 dropout totals by grades are as follows:

12th	13
11th	35
10th	32
9th	25
8th	20
7th	13
below 7th	11
total	149

Not all school systems deny that dropouts exist – New York and Hoboken, if not exactly outspoken on the subject, at least don't look the other way – but many prefer obfuscation to clarity, apparently on the theory that what they don't know can't hurt them.[10]

The picture becomes still murkier when we try to discover how many Puerto Rican high school students go on to college. No school system I visited has bothered to count, but in some high schools they answer not by the numbers but by the names. So few Puerto Ricans are going on to college that a principal can usually count them on one hand.[11]

All of which suggests that today's ghetto school, in its commerce with Puerto Rican children, is failing to do the job which the nation has traditionally assigned to it: that of assimilating newcomers into the American mainstream. The long-range implications of this failure are depressing in the extreme. The Puerto Rican population is swelling, and it is rapidly moving out of New York City into other metropolitan areas throughout the North. In 1960 the Puerto Rican population on the mainland was about 856,000, eighty per cent of whom lived in New York City.[12] Today the population is approximately 1.5 million. New York City's share may be as low as 62 per cent.[13]

One immediate consequence of the Puerto Rican diaspora is the strain it is putting on urban school systems already bent double under a combined burden of "deprived" children, deprived budgets and, in some cases, deprived imaginations. There are close to 400,000 Puerto Rican children enrolled in public schools. How are the schools responding to this latest challenge?

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[10]"The most vicious attribute of urban school systems, until recently," observes Peter Schrag, "has not been their consistent failure with the disadvantaged, but their refusal to produce honest data on that failure. In case after case, they pretended . . . despite statistical evidence to the contrary, that it was individual children, not schools, that failed."

[11]Those holding high school degrees are often ill-prepared to compete in the job market. In Newark a group of volunteer lady tutors found that many Puerto Rican girl graduates who had majored in secretarial studies were incapable of filling out a job application form.

[12]U.S. Census, 1960.

[13]Dr. Frank M. Cordasco puts the New York City Puerto Rican population at 69 per cent. *School & Society*, Feb. 18, 1967. For an explanation of how I arrived at various population estimates, see the Appendix.

II. THE SCHOOLS

"Del dicho al hecho
hay un gran trecho"

(Between the saying and the
doing there is a great distance)

The schools *are* responding – but feebly, haphazardly and slowly, oh so slowly. Most school systems with growing Puerto Rican enrollments point with pride to the progress they are making; and if the number of new programs is an indicator of progress, then a measure of pride is justified. ("Come see our demonstration" is the sort of invitation a visitor usually gets.) But while the schools may be making progress, the children, for the most part, are not. This is because most of the programs either miss the target entirely or else focus on such a tiny part of it that one must weigh their triumphs in milligrams. "Our attempts at solutions," observed Juan Cruz, a human relations specialist for Chicago schools, "are like trying to cover the sky with one hand." He could have added that what one actually covers on such occasions are one's eyes.[14]

The programs are a mixed bag. There are after-school tutorials and before-school breakfasts; teaching English as a second language and teaching English as a first language; bilingual approaches and non-lingual approaches; teacher visits to Puerto Rican homes and teacher "visitations" to Puerto Rico; efforts to make parents feel welcome and efforts to make parents feel guilty; seminars to convince teachers that Puerto Rican children have "special cultural needs" and seminars to convince teachers that Puerto Rican children are "just like everybody else." Every program boasts its own point-of-view; and every point-of-view seems to boast its own program.

The upshot, more often than not, is a considerable amount of random activity that creates an illusion of progress. Sorting out this tangled skein, we find three salient threads: one leads to teachers; one leads to children; and one leads to parents.

Changing Teachers

Every Puerto Rican parent has more than one angry story to tell about teachers who urge children to "go back to Puerto Rico," teachers who are not above using "spic", and teachers who mimic a child's accent in front of his classmates. But the problems, and the prejudices, are usually a good deal more subtle than these "atrocity" stories imply, and the solutions a good deal less obvious.

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[14]In their anxiety to make known how overwhelming is the "Puerto Rican problem," educators sometimes grope for similes: "It's like trying to start a car in a sand dune." "It's like trying to bail out a sinking ship with a teaspoon."

"You can't imagine how bigoted that man was only a couple of years ago, "my Puerto Rican guide said of a school principal I had just interviewed. "Now he can't do enough for us. Attitudes do change." They do indeed, and some of the schools' efforts have been so directed.

The target of these efforts, the teacher, is likely to be white, middle class and eager to teach. Doubtless she would have less trouble with students who were white, middle class and, according to her lights, eager to learn. Not that she has it in for anybody – if she is prejudiced in fact, she is "against prejudice" in theory – only that she "can't be expected to work miracles" on children who are "disadvantaged." The message, of course, is that the children are unteachable; and, as Kenneth Clark and others have pointed out, the message is self-fulfilling (similar to voting against a candidate because "he can't win").

Because she subscribes to the great American abstraction that "prejudice is bad," she abhors the more barbarous symptoms of bigotry and allows herself the luxury of feeling tolerant. The tolerance often turns to condescension. "Look at those glowing Spanish faces," a teacher in Chicago said to her visitor. "I think all Spanish children are beautiful, don't you?"

Denying her prejudices, the teacher also denies genuine differences among her students. In each city I asked teachers if their Puerto Rican pupils differed from the others in any way besides language. The denials were vehement.

There is, of course, something to be said for the egalitarian belief that all people are basically similar; but teachers who deny authentic cultural differences among their pupils are practicing a subtle form of tyranny. They are saying, "All people should pretend to be like everyone else even when they are not." That is how the majority culture imposes its standards upon a minority – a cruel sort of assimilation forced onto children in the name of equality. "They drink *coffee* for breakfast," a teacher whispered to me. "I'm trying to break them of that." José must become Joe.

Many school systems have recognized this problem and have made efforts to solve it. The two methods most in vogue are teacher tours of Puerto Rico (Hoboken's "Operation Assimilation thru Cultural Understanding" is one such) and teacher seminars (for example, Philadelphia's series of conferences aimed at "Building Bridges of Understanding"). Both these ideas have their merits, but one is less impressed by their potential than by their limits. The trips to the island, usually taken during winter, cannot escape a slightly touristic tinge no matter how serious the sponsor's intent. A look at some typical itineraries, complete with visits to El Yunque and St. Thomas, is not reassuring.

The seminars would be more valuable if more teachers attended them. Most adminis-

trations are compelled to pay, in either cash or credit-hours, in order to bring the teachers out. The Philadelphia experience is typical. Teachers are being paid $5.50 per hour to attend occasional half-day seminars on Saturdays, and attendance is far from good. Many of those who do show up offer no opinions and ask no questions.

The Philadelphia seminars were conceived by imaginative leaders in an effort to speak directly and frankly to the classroom teacher, and to encourage her to speak just as frankly about her problems with Puerto Rican children. Doubtless they have helped some teachers, but in general I am inclined to agree with Carmen Dinos' dictum, uttered at one of the seminars: "We don't want to change attitudes, we want to change behavior."

Perhaps closer to the mark are those programs which teach a smattering of Spanish to classroom teachers. Most cities offer such courses, and those who have taken advantage of them – again, the number is small[15] – usually find the going easier with their Puerto Rican pupils. A teacher who can greet her class in Spanish can start the day right. The children feel good about it (more at home?). In one class a teacher hurled a Spanish insult – "sinverguenza" (without shame) – at an obstreperous child. The boy thanked her, saying it had been a long time since he's been insulted in Spanish.

Obviously, the sense of estrangement that often baffles both the teacher and her students would be relieved by the presence of a Puerto Rican teacher. The sooner we get Puerto Rican teachers into our schools, the sooner we will make headway. The current picture is discouraging. Many school systems have no Puerto Rican teachers; some have a few. New York may have more than 100, no one seems to know for certain.[16] Over-strict language requirements in New York and elsewhere have discouraged many applicants.

Few Puerto Rican teachers move up to administrative positions, and those who do usually get there by virtue of their specialty: being a Puerto Rican. New York has five Puerto Rican supervisors, all of them connected in some way with the bilingual program. I did not find a single Puerto Rican high school counsellor in all the cities I visited. The high school counsellors I did find – some white, some black – were without exception uninformed, unsympathetic and unintelligent in their dealings with Puerto Rican children. A Puerto Rican student at Temple University in Philadelphia says he and his Puerto Rican college-mates were all advised by their counsellors not to try for college. They were told to get jobs in a factory.[17] The story is not atypical.

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[15]In Newark, for example, fewer than one per cent of the teachers – 20 out of 3,500 – have signed up for in-service courses in Spanish.

[16]Whatever the precise figure, it is miniscule in contrast to the number of Puerto Rican pupils. The school staffs in District #7 in the Bronx, for example, are two per cent Puerto Rican; the enrollment is 65 per cent Puerto Rican.

[17]This sort of callous put-down may in part be due to the training counsellors get. A check of three standard college textbooks on student counselling did not yield a single reference to Puerto Ricans, Negroes or any other minority group.

Teaching Children

On the floor of an elementary classroom in the Bronx is painted a large, colorful map of Puerto Rico. The teacher says, "Now everyone stand on the place where he came from," and there is a noisy scurrying of feet in the direction of Ponce, San Juan, Arecibo and Caguas.

The self-evident proposition that a child should know where he comes from, and be able to stand on it, dawned on most school systems only recently and is just beginning to make headway. A few social studies teachers are mentioning Puerto Rican history; a few school systems are planning a curriculum unit about the Caribbean islands; a few publishers are putting out pertinent materials. The position of Puerto Ricans today, in their efforts to establish themselves and their history as legitimate curriculum topics, is similar to that of the Negroes ten years ago.

On the other hand, schools have been quick to recognize that many Puerto Rican children have a "language problem", and they have come up with the traditional response: they have instituted all kinds of tutorials, orientation courses[18] and other short courses designed to submerge Spanish in a torrent of English. The idea behind all these special classes is that a child can hardly be expected to learn anything in school until he has first learned the school's language. In other words, the medium is the message.

Reasonable as this notion appears to be, the results have been most disappointing. More often than not the child is returned to the regular classroom knowing only a smattering of English – enough to get by sometimes but nowhere near enough to deal intelligently with the regular curriculum. His Spanish is inhibited and his English is sketchy. As more than one teacher has remarked, "He becomes illiterate in two languages."

He also becomes confused and anxious. In their eagerness to erase Spanish from the child's mind and substitute English, the schools are placing Puerto Rican children in an extremely ambiguous role. They are saying, "Forget where you came from, remember only where you are and where you are going." That is hardly the kind of message that inspires happy adjustments.

Now a growing number of educators are saying it may be easier and more profitable in the long run to change the school's language instead of the child's. That is an oversimplification, but the basic assumption behind bilingualism is that children learn more when taught in their native language. The other assumption is that children can gradually learn a second language – in this case, English – if it is introduced in the context of other subject matter. A few months ago the Congress of the United States in effect bought both these assumptions when it appropriated about $50 million, over a three-year period,

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[18]Sometimes, alas, called "citizenship classes".

to help local school systems set up bilingual programs, with Spanish taught as a native language and English as a mandatory second language.

The bilingual approach seems to make sense, but since nearly all new approaches in education shine with a glossy credibility, we have a right to ask for supporting evidence. Some new studies and my own observations provide some:[19]

• Dr. Nancy Modiano of New York University, studying children in a remote region of southern Mexico, found they read better when first taught to read in their original Indian languages and later exposed to Spanish. "The evidence of this study," she said, " . . . points to the efficiency of approaching reading in the national language through the mother tongue."

• In a three-year study of Spanish-speaking junior high school students in New York City, it was found that those who were taught science in Spanish performed better than those who were taught science in English. The first group also scored higher on city-wide reading tests and displayed "a more positive attitude toward self and background culture . . . ". The investigators surmised that "A student who can see the language of his home applied to the high prestige area of science study may hold himself and . . . his background in higher esteem."

• At Conners Elementary school in Hoboken, which is 48 per cent Puerto Rican, Spanish-speaking first-graders in a demonstration program are being taught to read and write in Spanish. Their classroom teacher is Cuban and their teacher aide is Puerto Rican. According to the school principal, who concedes he had at first been dubious of the program's value, the children are learning at a faster rate than comparable children in English-speaking classrooms. Moreover, he says, they are learning English, because it is being taught in the context of other subject matter. For example, the label on the color chart says both "roja" and "red", and the child is free to learn either. He usually learns both.

• Several years ago at P.S. 192 in Manhattan it was decided that "the best way to help our Puerto Rican children to achieve their potential was to place them in a special class with a specially trained teacher who can speak and teach in Spanish." This was done, and it is one of the reasons – though hardly the only one – why the average reading level among children there is very close to the national average. "If you put a Spanish-speaking kid into an English-speaking class," warns principal Seymour Gang, "he just vegetates." Two-thirds of P.S. 192's enrollment is Spanish-speaking.

The bilingual approach does not provide all the answers to all the problems, but it is the most promising technique available today. Its strengths are psychological as well as

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[19]For what it is worth, some of the older studies do not.

linguistic. A Spanish-speaking teacher in the classroom does more than speak Spanish. She creates a familiar climate which lessens the child's anxieties and frees him to concentrate on his main job, which is learning.

There has been some objection to bilingualism from Puerto Rican parents who fear it may be another excuse for segregating their children, and who complain that their children are supposed to learn English, not Spanish. But there is no reason to segregate, certainly not in the early grades. *All* the children can become bilingual: Spanish-speaking children can learn English and English-speaking children can learn Spanish. With a little luck and earnest attention, the schools can make growing up inside a melting pot the positive experience historians have always claimed it to be. But it is up to the schools to sell this idea to the parents.

Reaching Parents

Schools have a tendency to include parents in their list of frustrations and to exclude them in their deliberations. They often preach parent participation but what they are usually after is mere cooperation. PTAs in schools that are predominantly Puerto Rican are frequently more dead than alive. An elementary school principal in Chicago, after expounding on the importance of parent involvement, conceded that the school had no PTA because, "To be frank, it's a hell of a nuisance." Principals complain that Puerto Rican parents take no interest in the school and seldom come to meetings – "even when we print the notices in Spanish."

The complaints have some basis in fact, but PTAs are so commonly an instrument of the principal's policies, rather than of the community's will, that one can understand why parents stay home. A principal in Bridgeport told me, "My PTA is slow this year. I can't seem to find officers for it." She will doubtless continue to have trouble as long as she considers it *her* PTA.

As for the Puerto Rican parents, they often begin by thinking the schools can do no wrong and end by suspecting the schools can do no right. They thus proceed, over the disillusioning years, from a respectful reluctance to interfere to an angry readiness to protest. The path leads somewhat circuitously from authoritarianism to militant democracy, but the vital intervening stages – cooperation and participation – are usually missing.

In Bridgeport I took an informal survey among Puerto Rican families in a public housing project. No adult I interviewed among eleven families knew the name of any principals at the schools their children were attending, and only one person could name a teacher. No one was aware of having ever been invited to a parents' meeting at the school or of having been given any instructions on how they could best assist the school.

I mention this because the schools to which these parents send their children all say they believe in parent participation; their eagerness to involve parents in school programs is a point of pride. Obviously, the road from the school to the public housing project needs to be paved with more than good intentions.

Some school administrators have given up trying to make Puerto Rican parents feel welcome, on the grounds the parents don't stay in the neighborhood long enough. And it is true that "mobility" is a problem. Being poor, many Puerto Rican families are constantly on the move in search of better jobs and more livable housing. And being Puerto Rican, they are often on their way back to the island. In one typical week in Chicago, 105 children, direct from Puerto Rico, entered public schools, and 27 left to return to the island.

Schools sometimes distribute leaflets in Spanish dwelling on the virtues of "remaining in your school district," but the tone is usually sermonistic and the effects are apparently negligible. More effective, it seems, is P.S. 192's "method". P.S. 192 is one of the few ghetto schools where children are learning to read and do their arithmetic. Not only do families remain in the district, some families who don't live in the district say they do, so they can send their children to P.S. 192. One gets the impression that Puerto Ricans, like anyone else, will stay put if there is something worth staying for.

Education ranks high on the list. "On the island," observed a Puerto Rican educator in New York, "the teacher is second in prestige only to the priest." On the mainland the tradition carries over. Parents treat teachers with great respect (their notes sometimes begin, "Dear Esteemed Teacher . . . ") and often look upon them as "second parents". The teacher is expected to handle all problems that might arise during school hours.

But the American teacher would rather be a professional than a surrogate parent, and when a child presents more than the usual difficulties her first inclination is to call in the parents. This is common procedure in American schools, but it strikes many Puerto Rican parents as an uncommon nuisance. "Yesterday I had to leave my job and go to the school," a mother in Chicago complained recently, "because they said my boy was acting up. If he was acting up, why didn't they stop him? Isn't that what they're there for?"

The point can be argued either way. The problem is that it is seldom argued at all – there is seldom a decent dialogue taking place between parents and schools.

Many schools are trying hard to break through the sounding-off barrier. In Chicago some of the schools now have community representatives – appointed, unfortunately, by the principals – who act as bridges between the neighborhoods and the schools. Parents with complaints often seek redress through their community representatives. Schools in Philadelphia and elsewhere have enlisted the interest of many mothers by

organizing projects which bring Puerto Rican culture into the schools – for example, a school display of Puerto Rican art.

New York's community relations program has 148 bilingual specialists, and among their responsibilities is that of "mediating" between the schools and the communities. The specialists can be helpful in interpreting the community's wishes to the school system; but as with so many other ethnic "representatives" employed by school systems, there is always a question of whom he is supposed to represent, the communities or the schools. His ambiguous position is similar to John Alden's, for while serving as spokesman for one party he is constantly being pressed to court the other.

III. THE FUTURE

School systems are not in business to foment disorder or to invite organized attacks upon themselves. In the final analysis, it would be most surprising if the Puerto Rican community were to find its voice through programs sponsored by, or spokesmen hired by, local boards of education. As one such spokesman remarked recently, "The communities ask me why I'm not doing more for them. I ask them why they're not *forcing* me to do more. I have to be able to go to my superiors and say, 'This is what the people want, and they won't get off your back until they get it.'"

Borne on a fresh current of concern, some Puerto Rican parents are sensing the wisdom of such counsel. They are beginning to organize, to ask questions, to show up at board of education meetings. They are forming new Aspira clubs in Chicago, Waterbury, Rochester and throughout New Jersey. In Philadelphia Puerto Rican college students have launched a program aimed at encouraging Puerto Rican high school students to go on to college, and at discouraging high school counsellors from saying it can't be done. About a year ago a group of irate Philadelphia Puerto Rican mothers and college students succeeded, by picketing, in forcing the resignation of a nay-saying counsellor.

The new spirit, tentative as it is, has already started to pay off. It is hardly a coincidence that school systems like Chicago and Philadelphia have recently included Puerto Rican children in their ethnic enrollment totals. Their awakened interest in Puerto Rican pupils is a direct result of pressure from an awakening Puerto Rican community; and if counting the children remains a far cry from teaching them, it is nevertheless the first essential step on the path to reform.

It seems clear that one key to improvements inside the school is informed action from outside the school. Free-floating pressure has its uses, but if the Puerto Rican community is to make a major impact on the schools it will have to be through specific recommendations supported by specific data. No school system, no matter how humane its intentions, is likely to come up with a comprehensive program aimed at saving Puerto Rican children unless the community suggests one and presses for its enactment. The New York experience has already made this clear. In response to strong but non-specific pressures from the Puerto Rican community, the New York school system has "jumped on its horse and ridden off in all directions." It appears to be true that education is too important to be left entirely to the educators.

At the same time it would be a pointless cruelty for educators to delay reforms until parents demand them. Professional pride and self-respect should be sufficient goads We have said much during the sixties about children who don't learn; what are we to say now

about educators who don't educate and schools systems that don't notice? If the protests of parents are growing more frequent and more strident, it is not because the parents *know* more than the educators, it is because they *care* more. School systems that don't care, no matter their expertise, are hardly school systems at all, because very little "schooling" – teaching and learning – occurs within them. Things will get no better until the schools face up to their obligations and decide that what needs improvement is not their image but their performance. Meanwhile, they forfeit their responsibilities, just as the children forfeit their hopes and the nation forfeits its future. We are all the losers.

APPENDIX: THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA: A SPECULATION ON ITS SIZE

Making population estimates is a tricky enterprise – we have no complete figures later than the 1960 Census – but it is possible to hazard some interesting guesses. The 1960 Census lists the Puerto Rican population in the United States as 855,724. Four out of every five mainland Puerto Ricans lived in New York City and one out of every four Puerto Ricans in New York City was attenting public school.

Assuming this one-in-four ratio holds in other school systems, we can make deductions about Puerto Rican dispersion and population increases by examining current public school enrollment figures around the country. Here is a sample:

City	P.R. Public School Enrollment, 1967-68*	P.R. Pop., 1960**	Ext. P.R. Pop. 1968	increase
New York	244,458	612,574	977,832	60%
Chicago	25,500	32,371	102,000	208%
Philadelphia	6,299	14,424	25,196	73%
Hoboken	2,500	5,313	10,000	88%
Newark	5,300	9,698	21,200	118%

*figures were supplied by local school administrations
**U. S. Census, 1960

Other cities throughout the North – including Rochester, Bridgeport, Cleveland and Jersey City – have reported similarly astonishing increases in their Puerto Rican school enrollments.* In view of all this, it would seem far from illogical to assume that the Puerto Rican population outside New York City has more than doubled during the sixties, probably increasing by 2.5 times. If so, we can estimate the current mainland population at 1,586,397, 62 per cent of whom live in New York City. The breakdown between New York City and elsewhere would be as follows:

New York City	977,832 (62%)
Elsewhere	608,565 (38%)
Total	1,586,397 (100%)

Given these figures, we estimate the number of Puerto Rican children attending mainland public schools at 396,599 (one out of every four).

These speculative estimates of increases pose difficult problems of explanation. Official figures for net in-migration for the period in question account, at best, for an added 100,000 people. Granted that Puerto Rican families tend to be unusually large, it

*These current school enrollment figures alone range from 45% to 90% of the 1960 Census total Puerto Rican population figures.

seems almost incredible that population growth of this dimension could have come about through natural increase. Perhaps part of the answer is to be found in the U. S. Census Bureau's recent report that, in ghetto areas, difficulties in collecting statistics may have resulted in substantial gross underestimates of "non-white" population.